

Dedicated to the Advancement of the International Helicopter Community

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HAI Calls for Additional 5G Mitigations for Off-Airport Aviation Operations

Alexandria, VA (Jan. 3, 2022) – Under mounting pressure from top levels of the federal government and aviation industry leaders, AT&T and Verizon Communications Inc. have agreed to a two-week delay in deploying C band wireless spectrum that has been confirmed to interfere with the reliability of safety-critical aviation equipment. Helicopter Association International (HAI) welcomes the concession, which followed years-long efforts of HAI and other aviation stakeholders to work with the FCC to safely deploy 5G and avoid disruptions to aviation operations.

HAI commends the growing number of congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle who also called for a delay of 5G deployment, and we appreciate Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Administrator Steve Dickson for their stewardship of the National Airspace System (NAS).

The economic case for implementing additional mitigations for 5G interference at the nation’s busiest airports to reduce delays, diversions, and cancellations for commercial passenger and cargo flights is extremely compelling. HAI is encouraged to see the wireless carriers offer further concessions in attempt to resolve the devastating impact that 5G deployment would have on airline operations.

However, the effects of 5G deployment are not limited to the nation’s busiest airports, and mitigations by wireless carriers should not be limited to those locations either. All over the country, from densely populated cities to oil rigs 200 miles offshore, helicopters are used to save lives, serve and protect American citizens, and support critical industries in demanding environments—and many of those missions are conducted from start to finish without the use of airports.

Helicopter air ambulance (HAA) operators transport roughly 1,000 injured or critically ill patients every day. Up to 50,000 of the more than 300,000 people transported by HAA operators during 2021 were transported from off-airport/unimproved areas at night—meaning the mitigations proposed to maintain an equivalent level of safety at airports will have no effect on those operations. The families of those who die because a helicopter was not able to be dispatched to the scene of an accident because it was too close to a 5G tower will not be consoled by faster Internet speeds. The loss of a single life because of misguided 5G-related policies would be reprehensible.

The voluntary measures proposed by the wireless carriers would provide modest 5G limitations at the surface of public-use heliports, of which there are only 55 in the country. That number is dwarfed by the estimated 6,533 to 8,533 HAA landing sites in the United States, with more than 4,000 being private-use heliports colocated at hospitals.

HAI urges policy makers to strongly weigh the irreplaceable benefits to public safety that can only be delivered by helicopters. As regulators spend the next two weeks bridging the gap between the wireless industry's voluntary measures and what is needed to maintain the safety and usability of the NAS, solutions for helicopter operators must be prioritized.

Ensuring the safety of those who fly—whether pilots, crews, or passengers—is always HAI's top priority. As such, we will continue to advocate for reasonable limitations on 5G deployment so that safety-critical equipment on helicopters is not compromised by harmful interference. HAI will also continue to work with regulators to develop solutions that maintain safety and preserve the helicopter community's ability to operate in a 5G environment.

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HAI is the professional trade association for the international helicopter industry and represents more than 1,100 companies and over 16,000 industry professionals in more than 65 countries. Each year, HAI members safely operate more than 3,700 helicopters and remotely piloted aircraft approximately 2.9 million hours. HAI is dedicated to the promotion of the helicopter as a safe, effective method of commerce and to the advancement of the international helicopter community.